



# News Release

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## **Washington's beaches, lakes are fun — as long as everyone comes home safely** *Taking precautions can prevent tragedy*

**OLYMPIA** — Washington's early summer weather may not remind people of Maui, Malibu, or Mazatlan, but that won't stop hardy Northwesterners from heading for the water. Lots of people head to our streams, lakes, and saltwater beaches when it gets even slightly warm outside.

Before heading for the shore, though, make sure to take precautions that will make your visit safe as well as enjoyable.

Here are some hints to decrease risks of injury, illness, or even of death:

- **Do your homework.** Washington's [BEACH Program](http://www.doh.wa.gov/beach) website (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/beach>) shows whether high bacteria levels at a saltwater beach have led to a swimming advisory. Don't swim at beaches where advisories are posted.
- **Rain really isn't cleansing.** Stormwater runoff after rainfall carries toxins, pet waste, and wastewater from leaky sewage systems to beaches. Wait 48 hours after it rains to go in the water, especially when a dry period precedes the storm.
- **Don't swim in lakes with algae scum.** Pay attention to signs that signal toxic algae is present. Keep children and pets away from posted lakes.
- **Avoid urban creeks.** Stormwater runoff also gets into urban creeks. It often has high bacteria levels and contains toxins. Children shouldn't play in them.
- **Keep clean.** The same bacteria that can make you sick at home are present at beaches. After you use the restroom, use soap or sanitizer when you wash your hands. See that children do, too. Sick people, including those with diarrhea, shouldn't get in the water.

No one should swallow beach water. Take children to the restroom frequently. Don't change diapers near the water or bury them in the sand — dispose of them properly.

- **Wear sunscreen.** Despite Washington's rainy reputation, skin cancer is a risk in the state. Use sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher. Apply sunscreen 30 minutes before going outdoors. Reapply it every hour or two. Keep infants out of direct sunlight. Try to stay out of the sun from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. [Know your risks](http://www.skincancer.org) (www.skincancer.org).
- **Prevent drowning.** Many drowning victims can swim but aren't wearing life jackets. Many are 14 or younger. [Wear a life jacket](http://www.doh.wa.gov/Topics/WaterSafety.htm) (www.doh.wa.gov/Topics/WaterSafety.htm) on watercraft even if you know how to swim. Single out a responsible adult to watch young children, and pair-up with a swimming buddy. Learn CPR. Waves and rip currents can be dangerous; don't swim at beaches where they're common. In a rip current, swim parallel to shore; once free of the current, swim toward shore.
- **Don't drink.** Alcohol use before and during aquatic activities is a risk not worth taking. It hampers balance, coordination, and judgment. Avoid alcohol while supervising kids.
- **Be careful with shellfish.** Always [make sure you're in a safe shellfish area](http://www4.doh.wa.gov/gis/mogifs/biotoxin.htm) (www4.doh.wa.gov/gis/mogifs/biotoxin.htm) before harvesting and eating shellfish. Contaminated shellfish can cause illness and can even be lethal. Always "[Know Before You Dig](http://www.doh.wa.gov/shellfishsafety.htm)" (www.doh.wa.gov/shellfishsafety.htm).

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Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at <a href="http://www.doh.wa.gov">http://www.doh.wa.gov</a> for a healthy dose of information.
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